



Jhaleh K. Zaraweh's story of

Beaulah



My Mother was born to a Christian family on May 25, 1912 in Rangoon, Burma and was fifth in a family of six boys and six girls. Her name was Beulah, Muriel, Edna, May Andrews. Her Mother was from South India and dark and her Father was from England and white with red hair. Even though he was the only child he was ostracized by his family for marrying an Indian whereupon he changed his last name, we think from Bean to Andrews which was his Mother's maiden name. We never knew anything about my grandfather's family, except that his father was supposed to have been an Admiral in the Navy. Her Dad worked as a rice mill Engineer and they lived in a house built over a graveyard. As we were growing up we heard many a ghost story from my Mum about that old graveyard!

My mother always wanted to be white and she would heap powder on her face before she went to Church with her Dad and he would call her "powder monkey" and make her wipe off some of it, which tradition I carried on when I grew up. Before we would go out together, I would check out her face to make sure she had not lathered on the face powder – the only makeup she ever used. She would reluctantly wipe off some of the powder, if I said "powder monkey".

Mum was beautiful, shiny, black eyes, mischievous smile but lips that were firm when she meant business, small and plum – she always said she was four feet, eleven and a half inches but when we were old enough to measure her, we found out that she was just four feet, eleven and therefore a "dwarf" as the dictionary said. She objected strongly to this and said that she had shrunk with age.

Mum attended the Methodist School in Burma and had to go there by sampan. She was clever and was a lady of immense common sense. When my Mum was nineteen and just three months before her matriculation exam, she was kidnapped by my Dad, an Iranian. When she was thirteen, she had met my Dad who was a friend of her six brothers and he had told her then that he was going to marry her and she replied, "Who do you think you are, you long nosed Jew – Rudolph Valentino?" Iranians too have hooked noses plus he had bandy legs to boot! Sure enough, when she was returning from school, that fateful day, my Dad drew up in a car and a friend, pushed my Mum into the car, her books and her geometry case went flying, and drove her to an empty house, from where he called his conservative Iranian Mum and Dad, told them what he had done and that they should come with a Mullah so that they could make it legal that evening. The poor old man and old lady were all of a titter, came with the mullah and a sari to dress my Mum in. After they dressed Mum in the sari, she started to step out behind the bedroom curtain to meet the priest she said and her future mother-in-law went into a tizzy and told her she had to stay behind the curtain for the wedding ceremony and not go out where the men were sitting. Mum objected strongly to this.

My Mum's Mum and Dad did not talk to her after she married my Dad as he was a Muslim and my Mum became a Muslim and a very good one. Mum learned to love her mother-in-law and learned cooking from her. When they peeled potatoes together, my grandmother would peel eight, while my Mum was struggling with her first one and her mother-in-law would say gently, for all your reading and writing, they never taught you to peel potatoes in school? Mum and Dad lived with his parents and their sixteen children – eight boys and eight girls – some of whom were married and lived at home with their spouses. It was a huge house and each couple had their own room but one broom. Each had their own maid servant and would send her to borrow the broom to sweep their corner of the house. I think this irritated my Mum.

Three boys were born to my Mum in Burma – 1932, 1934, 1936 and then the Second World War was on and my Dad decided to take my Mum back to Iran – my Mum was now Beulah, Nargis Zaraweh. On that trip by sea – they did not have a regular cabin – my Mum used to shelter her youngest son with her own

body as he had the croup and the wind was very strong. My Dad started work in the Iranian Oil Company and we had a company home and two dogs. Then my fourth brother was born in 1938, my sister in 1940. Life was good, I believe, I was not there. Mum and Dad never left the house together, but took turns to stay with us, while the other went out. On January 1, 1945, my Mum was eight months pregnant with me and my Dad went out with some friends – only after my Mum persuaded him to go she says. Choices! On the a.m. of that morning my Dad at 37 was run over by the company truck bringing our ice. The roads were icy. It was said he was on the pavement but his friend was on the road and my Dad saw the truck and pushed his friend to the side but he slipped under the truck.

At the time my Dad passed, my Mum was sitting in the garden sewing, the dogs began to bark and someone hit the garden gate very hard and she saw two legs running by. She believed it was the spirit of my Dad saying goodbye. They never told my Mum until three days later that he had died; they were worried that she would go into labour too soon. Eastern custom, break bad news slowly. She feels my Dad had a premonition that he was going to die and three months before, he had told her that if anything ever happened to him, his greatest wish was that his children learn English and that she should take us to India to learn English. My Mum laughed and wanted to know where did he think he was going? After all she was 33 and he was 37 only. They also took a bet, my Dad said I would be a boy and my Mum said I would be a girl. Sorry Dad, the football team was not to be.

The Company only allowed us to stay in the Company home for a year and three months, till my Mum got our papers together for India. She had heard that Lucknow, India was the cheapest place to bring up six children and had the best English schools. My poor Mum six weeks on a ship to Bombay with four boys and two girls – the eldest just thirteen and rebellious needing two men to put him on board and me just a year and three months. Our two dogs left behind with our Uncle but the bigger one would not leave the jetty from where our boat had left and died soon thereafter. Strange country and culture India but at least English was the business language. By train to U.P. – Lucknow and a strange house – if someone knocked on the door at night – Mum would go first, then my four brothers behind her and then us two girls behind them. – Great moral support. We lived through the partition of India in 1947, with the help of good Hindu neighbours – Muslims in a Hindu world.

Mum was a strict but very fair Mum – no stupid rules for rules sake and no yelling and screaming, just calm and steady and commonsensical, as I said earlier. No going off to fulfill herself but always there with a warm meal and a hug for me. She made sure that we did our Senior Cambridge and would eat less so that we could eat more, until one day she fainted and the family doctor told her that if there was no food, then she must at least eat a banana a day to keep up her strength for the family. As long as my Mum and I lived together, we always shared an egg – never a whole one and fruit was always half and half. Mum, how little we knew of the quiet sacrifices you made for us out of love. Thank you. I remember the big dining table where after dinner we would all sit and chat about anything and I would be reluctant to leave and go to bed and you would take me and tuck me in and say prayers with me.

When my four brothers grew up, being Muslim they could not get jobs in India but had to move to East Pakistan and as they got established with jobs, my Mum, sister and I followed. A third country for my Mum and more adjustment, starting from scratch. Mum started to teach here, with no degree, internet, TV, cell phone; she became the respected Assistant Head Mistress of St. Mary's School in Chittagong, the port city of East Pakistan. Mum was a good teacher, she had taught me till Grade I at home – strict – she would not allow me to count on my fingers – and even if she was in the kitchen which looked straight down through the dining room into the bedroom where I would be sitting at the dressing table doing sums

– she could tell my hands were under the table counting. She would raise her sergeant major voice and open her eyes and my hands would appear back on the table – very seldom did she give me a whack on the knuckles with her hand – her eyes were enough for all of us – even to make us take the smallest and nearest goody closest to us when being offered to us by friends.

On June 15, 1960, when he was 22, my youngest brother Zaal drowned in the spillway of the dam on the Kharnafuly River. He was a strong swimmer and had taken a bet that he could swim the river but had not known they had just opened the spillway and there were a lot of logs spinning around. I remember how my Mum cried, kneeling and talking to God and telling Him that he had taken her husband and now her youngest son and why had God not taken her instead. She would have gladly gone in his place.

Mum was shy. I remember how nervous she was when my Chinese brother-in-law came to propose for my sister's hand in marriage. She advised but never interfered. She never talked about anyone. Always worried about money but had a very great faith and trust in God to look after us. My Mum became a born again Christian in the late fifties and was baptized in East Pakistan. Her one regret that she had taught my brothers the Muslim religion too well when she was Muslim. I remember her praying everyday fervently that God would save them.

In 1971 East Pakistan seceded from West Pakistan and India marched in to help cutting the electricity and water. My Mum and I were now the only ones living at home and we were caught in the war. The mortar bombs would fly over by night and Mum would pray great and heartfelt prayers to God to keep us safe. The sirens would go off and Mum would have to go to the toilet by candlelight – we would go together. We played a lot of snakes and ladders by candlelight. My sister-in-law, living in another neighbourhood, was due to have her third caesarean during all this turmoil of war. So my Mum got herself a rickshaw, waved a huge white handkerchief, with her hands up in the air, so neither side would shoot at her and went to where the Doctor was cowering in his house. She shored him up with courage and scoldings and got him to the hospital where the baby girl was delivered. I was at home praying she would not get shot but would come home safe to me.

In between I went for my interview with the Canadian High Commission and got stuck in West Pakistan and my Mum got left behind in East Pakistan which had now become Bangladesh. India and three thousand miles between us, with no connection between the two countries – and first time separated from my Mum – I never cried so much in my life. Mum escaped from Bangladesh with my brother and others in little sampans and landed in a refugee camp in Burma. Mum had always wanted to go back to Burma and bury her bones, she used to say but certainly not like this. She was in that camp for one year with only her Bible and a change of clothes and sleeping on a mat on the floor. We made contact through the Red Cross, thank God. I have letters from my Mum that she wrote me while in the camp – letters to be strong and to make you cry. After one year she arrived in Karachi, West Pakistan, looking old and grey – I cried at the sight of her.

We both immigrated to Vancouver, Canada, I in 1974 and her in 1975. We lived in the West End, where she loved the Baptist Church, made many friends. Her eyes would light up at the mention of a walk/picnic in the park to see the duckies and the squirrels. She loved to dance the waltz and had a voice like a nightingale and sang many solos in Church and old folks' homes. Danny Boy was her favourite song after my brother died. I sing it to her when I visit her grave.

My Mum left my home in 1992 and lived in a home for five years. Mum had Alzheimer's – when we walked she would hold my hand and I would cry. This was my strong mother who had always taken care of me

and whose hand I loved to hold as a child. She died on May 28, 1997 – beloved Mother of Jhaleh Kulsoom Zaraweh.